

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Editorial

Four for One Dollar

Again we call attention to the special offer of the Board to send the EVANGELIST three months to four different persons for one dollar. This appears to us an excellent opportunity to do missionary work among those who are not acquainted with the doctrine of the Brethren church. It is our aim to make the EVANGELIST more missionary in spirit and more doctrinal in its teachings. Dear reader, are there not four friends within the circle of your acquaintance who would be profited reading the EVANGELIST for three months? Send one dollar to the Brethren Publication Board and with it the names and addresses of four persons to whom you want the paper sent. Be sure to examine further announcement on page 14, column 1.

Profession and Performance

No other string is so persistently played upon by the critics of the church as the discrepancy between profession and performance. Now this may be merely the expression of natural enmity against religion, or it may be the expression of honest perplexity arising from ignorance of its philosophy. In the first instance we have little concern with that unreasoning enmity which cavils at the church, and at church people, simply in obedience to a malicious impulse. Meet all the objections of a critic of this kind, silence all his arguments, disprove all his slanders, spike all his guns, yet you do not reach the core of the trouble, which is in his own heart the inveterate malice of unrighteousness against the righteousness which condemns it. After you have demolished all his alleged arguments he will continue to bray, perhaps louder than ever, and show to all the world how enmity can survive reason, and how its sole object is, not at all to arrive at the truth, but merely to drown you in a catarract of noise and bluster.

But the case is different with those people who in their ignorance of the philosophy of religion are honestly perplexed at the wide distance which so often intervenes between ideals of the church as set forth in her divine text, and the actual state of the church as set forth in her membership, between profession and performance, also in the individual Christian. In both instances the discrepancy is manifest, and may easily furnish ground for honest perplexity in an unilluminated mind. To such a mind the very first impression is that the individual who thus fails to live up to his profession is dishonest, hence the very common charge of hypocrisy which is leveled at church members, often without discrimination, for it is seen and can be easily

proved that no church lives up to its creed, and no individual Christian life can be found which stands on a level with its profession, its Bible standard, its divine ideal.

In the very nature of the case this must be true of a divine religion. A church is composed of individual members. Now in order to have a church which in all respects stands on a level with its ideal, a perfect church, we must have a community of individual members whose lives agree in all respects and at all times with the divine ideal of a Christian life. Not only must a portion of the membership be thus perfect, but every member, and if we were privileged to look upon such a church, we would see a community of individuals as perfect as Jesus was when he lived in the flesh. To conceive of Christ as living an imperfect life, or establishing an imperfect religion, is to disrobe him of his divinity, and it therefore follows that a divine religion, a divine ideal of life, is forever beyond the reach of an imperfect creature, forever beyond his utmost endeavors, a standard always in advance of the advancing hosts, and always climbing the difficult and laborious heights of personal holiness, and spiritual achievement.

A discrepancy therefore between profession and performance which exists of necessity, which can not be helped, does not at all argue hypocrisy, altho it gives hypocrisy its opportunity, and becomes the refuge of the spiritually dishonest. That such dishonesty exists among professors of religion no one will deny, but it is not so general as the enemies of religion aver, and, unless it betrays itself by flagrancy, exists in a realm which is inaccessible to human vision, and open only to the eye of God.

A remarkable effect has been produced by the essential inaccessibility of the Christian ideal, and the universal failure to realize in human practice its lofty and divine standard of perfection. Short sighted people inside of the church have been so unduly impressed with the strictures of short-sighted people outside of the church, and also perhaps so discouraged by a conception of religion continually beyond imperfect human reach, that they have gone to work to fence in a little patch of truth out of its infinite expanse, and have persuaded themselves to imagine, like the ant in the garden, that all the world lies within those little walls. These little patches, for there are quite a number of them, are variously named creeds, systems of theology, forms of doctrine, ordinances, and the organs of each group seriously proclaim to the whole world that they, and sometimes they only, represent the whole gospel. Not long since a religious weekly, authorized organ of a sect, or church, gravely announced in its editorial columns that it was the only paper in the world that set forth the whole gospel. We can easily believe, even without a tax upon charity, that such a statement has no